

The Humbling Philip Roth

A critical evaluation of Philip Roth—the first of its kind—that takes on the man, the myth, and the work Philip Roth is one of the most renowned writers of our time. From his debut, *Goodbye, Columbus*, which won the National Book Award in 1960, and the explosion of Portnoy's *Complaint* in 1969 to his haunting reimagining of Anne Frank's story in *The Ghost Writer* ten years later and the series of masterworks starting in the mid-eighties—*The Counterlife*, *Patrimony*, *Operation Shylock*, *Sabbath's Theater*, *American Pastoral*, *The Human Stain*—Roth has produced some of the great American literature of the modern era. And yet there has been no major critical work about him until now. Here, at last, is the story of Roth's creative life. *Roth Unbound* is not a biography—though it contains a wealth of previously undisclosed biographical details and unpublished material—but something ultimately more rewarding: the exploration of a great writer through his art. Claudia Roth Pierpont, a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, has known Roth for nearly a decade. Her carefully researched and gracefully written account is filled with remarks from Roth himself, drawn from their ongoing conversations. Here are insights and anecdotes that will change the way many readers perceive this most controversial and galvanizing writer: a young and unhappily married Roth struggling to write; a wildly successful Roth, after the uproar over Portnoy, working to help writers from Eastern Europe and to get their books known in the West; Roth responding to the early, Jewish—and the later, feminist—attacks on his work. Here are Roth's family, his inspirations, his critics, the full range of his fiction, and his friendships with such figures as Saul Bellow and John Updike. Here is Roth at work and at play. *Roth Unbound* is a major achievement—a highly readable story that helps us make sense of one of the most vital literary careers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The definitive Philip Roth edition continues with three novels written in his late sixties and early seventies. *The Dying Animal* (2001) marks the final return of David Kepesh from *The Breast* (1972) and *The Professor of Desire* (1977). Now an eminent cultural critic in his sixties, Kepesh expertly seduces a beautiful twenty-four-year-old daughter of Cuban exiles only to find himself torn by sexual jealousy and the anguish of loss. As *The Plot Against America* (2004) begins, aviation hero Charles A. Lindbergh has defeated Franklin Roosevelt in the 1940 presidential election, and fear invades every Jewish household in America. Lindbergh has publicly blamed the Jews for pushing America toward a pointless war with Nazi Germany, and now in office, he negotiates a cordial “understanding” with Adolf Hitler. What follows for Jews during the Lindbergh presidency—most particularly in the Newark household of the boy Philip Roth—is the subject of an extraordinary work of historical imagination. With *Exit Ghost* (2007) Roth rings down the curtain on perhaps his greatest literary creation. Nathan Zuckerman returns to a radically changed New York, the city he left eleven years before, where a rash decision draws him into a vivid drama rife with implications for his future, and his past. Philip Roth is the only living American novelist to have his work published in a comprehensive, definitive edition by The Library of America. He has received the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award twice, the PEN/Faulkner Award three times, the National Medal of Arts, and the Gold Medal in Fiction, the highest award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. LIBRARY OF AMERICA is an independent nonprofit cultural organization founded in 1979 to preserve our nation's literary heritage by publishing, and keeping permanently in print, America's best and most significant writing. The Library of America series includes more than 300 volumes to date, authoritative editions that average 1,000 pages in length, feature cloth covers, sewn bindings, and ribbon markers, and are printed on premium acid-free paper that will last for centuries.

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'The comedy of neuroses, as Roth practices it, has much of the elegance of an 18th-century comedy of manners, but it also allows itself plenty of latitude. ZUCKERMAN UNBOUND has room for farce, when Zuckerman spends a night with an Irish film star whose steady lover is Fidel Castro; as well as for a full, accomplished treatment of a grim routine, the death of a Jewish father. But mainly it has one great comic character, the sad and threatening Alvin Pepler, ex-Marine and ex-TV celebrity, now alleging the theft of his private hang-ups, which are on the same lines as Portnoy's, for use in the famous novel. In this chapter Dickens and Waugh live again' LONDON REVIEW OF BOOKS. Patrimony, a true story, touches the emotions as strongly as anything Philip Roth has ever written. Roth watches as his eight-six-year-old father—famous for his vigor, his charm, and his repertoire of Newark recollections—battles with the brain tumor that will kill him. The son, full of love, anxiety, and dread, accompanies his father through each fearful stage of his final ordeal, and, as he does so, discloses the survivalist tenacity that has distinguished his father's long, stubborn engagement with life. Philip Roth is hailed by many as the reigning king of American fiction. Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, this memoir about love, survival and memory is one of his most intimate books, but also one of his most intellectually vigorous. Patrimony is Roth's elegy to his father, written with piercing observation and wit at the height of his literary prowess.

Newly discharged from the Korean War, Gabe Wallach struggles to live seriously and act generously. The reader will find acclaimed author Philip Roth's fictional study of 1950's American morals and social mores far different from those of today. TIME calls Roth "The uncontested master of comic irony".

Everything is over for Simon Axler, the protagonist of the history. One of the leading American stage actors of his generation, now in his sixties, he has lost his magic, his talent and his assurance. His Falstaff and Peer Gynt and Vanya, all his great roles, 'are melted into air, into thin air'. When he goes on stage he feels like a lunatic and looks like an idiot. His confidence in his powers has drained away; he imagines people laughing at him; he can no longer pretend to be someone else. His wife has gone, his audience has left him, his agent can't persuade him to make a comeback. Into this shattering account of inexplicable and terrifying self-evacuation bursts a counterplot of unusual erotic desire, a consolation for the bereft life so risky and aberrant that it points not towards comfort and gratification but to a yet darker and more shocking end. In this long day's journey into night, told with Roth's inimitable urgency, bravura and gravity, all the ways that we persuade ourselves of our solidity, all our life's performances - talent, love, sex, hope, energy, reputation - are stripped off.

On March 19, 2013, a distinguished group of writers and critics gathered at the Newark Museum's Billy Johnson Auditorium in Newark, New Jersey, to celebrate the extraordinary career and lasting literary legacy of Philip Roth on the occasion of his 80th birthday. This keepsake volume gathers remarks from the evening's speakers, a fitting tribute to the only living novelist whose work is collected in the Library of America series. Here you'll find Jonathan Lethem, hilariously recounting his first consciousness-raising encounter with Roth's work through the Kafkaesque novel *The Breast*; Hermione Lee, tracing the Shakespearian themes in Roth's books, from *Portnoy's Complaint* to *The Humbling*; Alain Finkielkraut, offering a deep reading of Roth's final novel, *Nemesis*; Claudia Roth Pierpont, assessing Roth's portrayal of women in such books as *Sabbath's Theater* and *The Human Stain*; Edna O'Brien, recalling her long friendship with Roth; and the author himself, offering a quintessentially Rothian valediction.

Against the backdrop of the Korean War, a young man faces life's unimagined chances and terrifying consequences. It is 1951 in America, the second year of the Korean War. A studious, law-abiding, intense youngster from Newark, New Jersey, Marcus Messner, is beginning his sophomore year on the pastoral, conservative campus of Ohio's Winesburg College. And why is he there and not at the local college in

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Newark where he originally enrolled? Because his father, the sturdy, hard-working neighborhood butcher, seems to have gone mad -- mad with fear and apprehension of the dangers of adult life, the dangers of the world, the dangers he sees in every corner for his beloved boy. As the long-suffering, desperately harassed mother tells her son, the father's fear arises from love and pride. Perhaps, but it produces too much anger in Marcus for him to endure living with his parents any longer. He leaves them and, far from Newark, in the midwestern college, has to find his way amid the customs and constrictions of another American world. Indignation, Philip Roth's twenty-ninth book, is a story of inexperience, foolishness, intellectual resistance, sexual discovery, courage, and error. It is a story told with all the inventive energy and wit Roth has at his command, at once a startling departure from the haunted narratives of old age and experience in his recent books and a powerful addition to his investigations of the impact of American history on the life of the vulnerable individual.

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A rigorously unfictionalized narrative that portrays Roth unadorned -- as young artist, as student, as son, as lover, as husband, as American, as Jew -- and candidly examines how close the novels have been to, and how far from, autobiography.

Radio actor Iron Rinn (born Ira Ringold) is a big Newark roughneck blighted by a brutal personal secret from which he is perpetually in flight. An idealistic Communist, a self-educated ditchdigger turned popular performer, a six-foot six-inch Abe Lincoln look-alike, he marries the nation's reigning radio actress and beloved silent-film star, the exquisite Eve Frame (born Chava Fromkin). Their marriage evolves from a glamorous, romantic idyll into a dispiriting soap opera of tears and treachery. And with Eve's dramatic revelation to the gossip columnist Bryden Grant of her husband's life of "espionage" for the Soviet Union, the relationship enlarges from private drama into national scandal. Set in the heart of the McCarthy era, the story of Iron Rinn's denunciation and disgrace brings to harrowing life the human drama that was central to the nation's political tribulations in the dark years of betrayal, the blacklist, and naming names. *I Married a Communist* is an American tragedy as only Philip Roth could write it.

Everything is over for Simon Axler, the protagonist of Philip Roth's startling new book. One of the leading American stage actors of his generation, now in his sixties, he has lost his magic, his talent, and his assurance. His Falstaff and Peer Gynt and Vanya, all his great roles, "are melted into air, into thin air." When he goes onstage he feels like a lunatic and looks like an idiot. His confidence in his powers has drained away; he imagines people laughing at him; he can no longer pretend to be someone else. "Something fundamental has vanished." His wife has gone, his audience has left him, his agent can't persuade him to make a comeback. Into this shattering account of inexplicable and terrifying self-evacuation bursts a counterplot of unusual erotic desire, a consolation for a bereft life so risky and aberrant that it points not toward comfort and gratification but to a yet darker and more shocking end. In this long day's journey into night, told with Roth's inimitable urgency, bravura, and gravity, all the ways that we convince ourselves of our solidity, all our life's performances—talent, love, sex, hope, energy, reputation—are stripped off. *The Humbling* is Roth's thirtieth book.

In this funny and chilling novel, the setting is a small town in the 1940s Midwest, and the subject is the heart of a wounded and ferociously moralistic young woman, one of those implacable American moralists whose "goodness" is a terrible disease. When

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she was still a child, Lucy Nelson had her alcoholic failure of a father thrown in jail. Ever since then she has been trying to reform the men around her, even if that ultimately means destroying herself in the process. With his unerring portraits of Lucy and her hapless, childlike husband, Roy, Roth has created an uncompromising work of fictional realism, a vision of provincial American piety, yearning, and discontent that is at once pitiless and compassionate.

Letting Go is Roth's first full-length novel, published just after Goodbye, Columbus, when he was twenty-nine. Set in 1950s Chicago, New York, and Iowa city, Letting Go presents as brilliant a fictional portrait as we have of a mid-century America defined by social and ethical constraints and by moral compulsions conspicuously different from those of today. Newly discharged from the Korean War army, reeling from his mother's recent death, freed from old attachments and hungrily seeking others, Gabe Wallach is drawn to Paul Herz, a fellow graduate student in literature, and to Libby, Paul's moody, intense wife. Gabe's desire to be connected to the ordered "world of feeling" that he finds in books is first tested vicariously by the anarchy of the Herzes' struggles with responsible adulthood and then by his own eager love affairs. Driven by the desire to live seriously and act generously, Gabe meets an impassable test in the person of Martha Reganhart, a spirited, outspoken, divorced mother of two, a formidable woman who, according to critic James Atlas, is masterfully portrayed with "depth and resonance." The complex liason between Gabe and Martha and Gabe's moral enthusiasm for the trials of others are at the heart of this tragically comic work.

The interviews, essays, and articles collected here span a quarter century of Philip Roth's distinguished career and "reveal [a] preoccupation with the relationship between the written and the unwritten world." Here is Roth on himself and his work and the controversies it has engendered. Here too are Roth's writings on the Eastern European writers he has always championed; and on baseball, American fiction, and American Jews. The essential collection of nonfiction by a true American master, Reading Myself and Others features his long interview with The Paris Review.

Gil Gamesh is the only pitcher who ever tried to kill the umpire, and John Baal, The Babe Ruth of the Big House, never hit a home run sober. But you've never heard of them -- or of the Ruppert Mundys, the only homeless big-league ball team in American history -- because of the communist plot and the capitalist scandal that expunged the entire Patriot League from baseball memory. Philip Roth's richly imagined satiric narrative, The Great American Novel, turns baseball's status as national pastime and myth into an unfettered farce featuring heroism and perfidy, lively wordplay and a cast of characters that includes the House Un-American Activities Committee.

A prominent TV culture critic and lecturer, sixty-plus David Kepesh finds his world thrown into erotic turmoil by Consuela Castillo, a twenty-four-year-old beauty who ignites in him a sexual possessiveness, unreasoning jealousy, and obsessive passion. Reprint. It is 1998, the year in which America is whipped into a frenzy of prurience by the impeachment of a president, and in a small New England town, an aging classics professor, Coleman Silk, is forced to retire when his colleagues decree that he is a racist. The charge is a lie, but the real truth about Silk would have astonished his most virulent accuser. Coleman Silk has a secret. But it's not the secret of his affair, at seventy-one, with Faunia Farley, a woman half his age with a savagely wrecked past--a part-time

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farmhand and a janitor at the college where, until recently, he was the powerful dean of faculty. And it's not the secret of Coleman's alleged racism, which provoked the college witch-hunt that cost him his job and, to his mind, killed his wife. Nor is it the secret of misogyny, despite the best efforts of his ambitious young colleague, Professor Delphine Roux, to expose him as a fiend. Coleman's secret has been kept for fifty years: from his wife, his four children, his colleagues, and his friends, including the writer Nathan Zuckerman, who sets out to understand how this eminent, upright man, esteemed as an educator for nearly all his life, had fabricated his identity and how that cannily controlled life came unraveled. Set in 1990s America, where conflicting moralities and ideological divisions are made manifest through public denunciation and rituals of purification, *The Human Stain* concludes Philip Roth's eloquent trilogy of postwar American lives that are as tragically determined by the nation's fate as by the "human stain" that so ineradicably marks human nature. This harrowing, deeply compassionate, and completely absorbing novel is a magnificent successor to his Vietnam-era novel, *American Pastoral*, and his McCarthy-era novel, *I Married a Communist*.

The writer Nathan Zuckerman comes down with a mysterious physical affliction--pure pain, beginning in his neck and shoulders, invading his torso and taking possession of his life. Zuckerman, whose work was his life, is unable to write a line. Now his work is trekking from one doctor to the next--from orthopedist to osteopath to neurologist to psychiatrist--but none can find a cause for the pain and nobody can assuage it. So begins Philip Roth's strangely comic new novel, *The Anatomy Lesson*. In it, we find Nathan Zuckerman beset at age forty not only by his pain but by his past. He seriously wonders if he ought to be a novelist at all. At his wit's end, bewildered by both the obstinate pain and the isolating profession, and unconsolable by his "harem of Florence Nightingales"--Gloria, his accountant's wildly mothering wife; Jaga, the depressed Polish refugee from the hair-treatment clinic (to add to his suffering, Zuckerman is going bald); Diana, the distressingly self-possessed Finch College heiress; and the temptingly levelheaded painter Jenny--Zuckerman tries to pin his catastrophe on some source he can confront. There is no shortage of candidates. Zuckerman's brother blames his acerbic best-seller Carnovsky, for ruining the lives of their late parents, and will have nothing to do with him. There's the critic Milton Appel, once Zuckerman's literary conscience, now his scourge--the Grand Inquisitor of *Inquiry* magazine, the *New York Jewish* cultural monthly. Searching desperately for a diagnosis that will lead to a cure, Zuckerman asks himself if the pain can have been caused by his adversaries, or by his astonishingly intractable grief for his mother, or by the disgust he has come to feel for the literary vocation he once loved. And while he is wondering, his dependence on painkillers grows into an addiction to Percodan, marijuana, and hundred-proof vodka. In the last half of *The Anatomy Lesson*, Zuckerman breaks out of invalid imprisonment in his Manhattan apartment and sets off on a journey to escape the pain, the adversaries, the grief, and the career--a journey into a new existence, a search for a "second life." Persuaded that a doctor's life is everything a writer's is not, Zuckerman flies to Chicago with the intention of applying to medical school at his alma mater. Though the pain he encounters there is worse even than what he's fled, the startling quest for the second life provides some of the funniest scenes in all of Roth's fiction. With the serious playfulness and extravagant insistence characteristic of his work, Roth, in his fourteenth published book, presents an astonishing antithesis to *The Magic Mountain*: *The Anatomy Lesson* is a great comedy of

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illness. Roth's strength has always been the ability to depict the boisterous, the farcical, and the extreme in human behavior while revealing at the same time a world that immediately strikes the reader as real--what the English critic Hermione Lee has called, in writing of Roth's career, "a manner at once...brash and thoughtful...lyrical and wry, which projects through comic expostulations and confessions of the speakers a knowing, humane authority." The Anatomy Lesson is one of Roth's finest achievements in this vein--a comic masterpiece and brilliant finale to the Zuckerman trilogy. The Anatomy Lesson was a finalist for the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award.

Philip Roth's new novel is a candidly intimate yet universal story of loss, regret, and stoicism. The best-selling author of *The Plot Against America* now turns his attention from "one family's harrowing encounter with history" (*New York Times*) to one man's lifelong skirmish with mortality. The fate of Roth's everyman is traced from his first shocking confrontation with death on the idyllic beaches of his childhood summers, through the family trials and professional achievements of his vigorous adulthood, and into his old age, when he is rended by observing the deterioration of his contemporaries and stalked by his own physical woes. A successful commercial artist with a New York ad agency, he is the father of two sons from a first marriage who despise him and a daughter from a second marriage who adores him. He is the beloved brother of a good man whose physical well-being comes to arouse his bitter envy, and he is the lonely ex-husband of three very different women with whom he's made a mess of marriage. In the end he is a man who has become what he does not want to be. The terrain of this powerful novel -- Roth's twenty-seventh book and the fifth to be published in the twenty-first century -- is the human body. Its subject is the common experience that terrifies us all. *Everyman* takes its title from an anonymous fifteenth-century allegorical play, a classic of early English drama, whose theme is the summoning of the living to death.

"I don't want you to rehabilitate me," Philip Roth said to his only authorized biographer, Blake Bailey. "Just make me interesting." Granted complete independence and access, Bailey spent almost ten years poring over Roth's personal archive, interviewing his friends, lovers, and colleagues, and listening to Roth's own breathtakingly candid confessions. Cynthia Ozick, in her front-page rave for the *New York Times Book Review*, described Bailey's monumental biography as "a narrative masterwork ... As in a novel, what is seen at first to be casual chance is revealed at last to be a steady and powerfully demanding drive. ... under Bailey's strong light what remains on the page is one writer's life as it was lived, and?almost?as it was felt." Though Roth is generally considered an autobiographical novelist—his alter-egos include not only the Roth-like writer Nathan Zuckerman, but also a recurring character named Philip Roth—relatively little is known about the actual life on which so vast an oeuvre was supposedly based. Bailey reveals a man who, by design, led a highly compartmentalized life: a tireless champion of dissident writers behind the Iron Curtain on the one hand, Roth was also the Mickey Sabbath-like roué who pursued scandalous love affairs and aspired "[t]o affront and affront and affront till there was no one on earth unaffronted"—the man who was pilloried by his second wife, the actress Claire Bloom, in her 1996 memoir, *Leaving a Doll's House*. Towering above it all was Roth's achievement: thirty-one books that give us "the truest picture we have of the way we live now," as the poet Mark Strand put it in his remarks for Roth's Gold Medal at the 2001

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American Academy of Arts and Letters ceremonial. Tracing Roth's path from realism to farce to metafiction to the tragic masterpieces of the American Trilogy, Bailey explores Roth's engagement with nearly every aspect of postwar American culture. A young writer in search of a spiritual father, Nathan Zuckerman views E. I. Lonoff, who lives with his wife and his student-mistress in rural Massachusetts, as an embodiment of the ideal of artistic integrity and independence

What if a lookalike stranger stole your name, usurped your biography and went around the world pretending to be you? In this tour de force of fact and fiction, Philip Roth meets a man who may or may not be Philip Roth. Because someone with that name has been touring the State of Israel, promoting a bizarre exodus in reverse of the Jews. Roth decides to stop him—even if that means impersonating his impersonator. Suspenseful, hilarious, hugely impassioned, pulsing with intelligence and narrative energy, *Operation Shylock* is at once a spy story, a political thriller, a meditation on identity, and a confession. Like Pushkin and Dostoevsky before him, Philip Roth takes on the subject of the writer's double, which for Roth is inevitably bound up in Jewishness and identity. This is a bold, inventive and energetic departure from his past novels, a meta-novel, and, like all of his writing, full of ideas, wit, humor and startling observation.

Presents an intimate, incisive portrait of a middle-aged American living in London and his mistress, a married Englishwoman, through a series of private, adulterous dialogues. Reprint.

The legendary author's essays and interviews explore how fellow writers from Milan Kundera to Edna O'Brien are influenced by time, place, and politics. Writers are often deeply influenced by the time and place in which they live and write. In *Shop Talk*, Philip Roth, winner of a National Book Award, a Pulitzer Prize, and numerous other literary honors, explores the intimate relationship a writer's experience has with his or her work. In a series of essays, Roth recounts his intellectual encounters with writers, discussing with them the diverse regions from which they hail and pondering the influence of locale, politics, and history on their work. Featuring luminaries such as Milan Kundera discussing Czechoslovakia; Primo Levi talking about Auschwitz; Edna O'Brien reflecting on Ireland; Isaac Bashevis Singer tackling Warsaw; Aharon Appelfeld on Bukovina; and Ivan Klíma on Prague, Roth's conversations touch on the conditions that inspire great art, with artists as attuned to the subtleties of their societies as they are the nuances of words. Also including a portrait of Bernard Malamud, a written exchange with Mary McCarthy about Roth's *The Counterlife*, and the essay "Rereading Saul Bellow," *Shop Talk* is a "fascinating [glimpse] of some of the deans of postwar literature" (*Los Angeles Times Book Review*).

Finalist for the 2020 National Jewish Book Awards A deeply felt, beautifully crafted meditation on friendship and loss in the vein of *A Year of Magical Thinking*, and a touching portrait of Philip Roth from his closest friend. When I entered the examining room twenty minutes after our arrival at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital, Philip said, "No more books." Thus he announced his retirement. So begins Benjamin Taylor's *Here We Are*, the unvarnished portrait of his best friend and one

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of America's greatest writers. Philip Roth's place in the canon is secure, but less clear is what the man himself was like. In Benjamin Taylor's beautifully constructed memoir, we see Roth as a mortal man, experiencing the joys and sorrows of aging, reflecting on his own writing, and doing something we all love to do: passing the time in the company of his closest friend. An ode to friendship and its wondrous ability to brighten our lives in unexpected ways, *Here We Are* pays tribute to a friend in the way that only a writer can. Roth encouraged Taylor to write this book, giving him explicit instructions not to sugarcoat anything and not to publish it until after his death. Taylor's memoir will be the definitive account of Philip Roth as he lived for years to come.

After he is transformed into a 155-pound female breast, college professor David Kepesh struggles to rationalize his condition by proving he is insane

The Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *American Pastoral* offers the story of Simon Axler--an actor in his 60ies who has lost his wife, his audience and confidence in his talent--whose risky and aberrant desire points toward a dark and shocking end. Reprint. A Los Angeles Times best-seller.

Winner of the Man Booker International Prize 2011 In the "stifling heat of equatorial Newark," a terrifying epidemic is raging, threatening the children of the New Jersey city with maiming, paralysis, lifelong disability, and even death. This is the startling theme of Philip Roth's wrenching new book: a wartime polio epidemic in the summer of 1944 and the effect it has on a closely knit, family-oriented Newark community and its children. At the center of *Nemesis* is a vigorous, dutiful twenty-three-year-old playground director, Bucky Cantor, a javelin thrower and weightlifter, who is devoted to his charges and disappointed with himself because his weak eyes have excluded him from serving in the war alongside his contemporaries. Focusing on Cantor's dilemmas as polio begins to ravage his playground—and on the everyday realities he faces—Roth leads us through every inch of emotion such a pestilence can breed: the fear, the panic, the anger, the bewilderment, the suffering, and the pain. Moving between the smoldering, malodorous streets of besieged Newark and Indian Hill, a pristine children's summer camp high in the Poconos—whose "mountain air was purified of all contaminants"—Roth depicts a decent, energetic man with the best intentions struggling in his own private war against the epidemic. Roth is tenderly exact at every point about Cantor's passage into personal disaster, and no less exact about the condition of childhood. Through this story runs the dark questions that haunt all four of Roth's late short novels, *Everyman*, *Indignation*, *The Humbling*, and now *Nemesis*: What kind of accidental choices fatally shape a life? How does the individual withstand the onslaught of circumstance?

The sensationalizing sixties are coming to an end, and even writing a novel can make you a star. The writer Nathan Zuckerman publishes his fourth book, an aggressive, abrasive, and comically erotic novel entitled *Carnovsky*, and all at

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once he is on the cover of *Life*, one of the decade's most notorious celebrities. This is the same Nathan Zuckerman who in Philip Roth's much praised *The Ghost Writer* was the dedicated young apprentice drawing sustenance from the great books and the integrity of their authors. Now in his mid-thirties, Zuckerman, a would-be recluse despite his fame, ventures out on the streets of Manhattan, and not only is he assumed to be his own fictional satyr, Gilbert Carnovsky ("Hey, you do all that stuff in that book?"), but he also finds himself the target of admirers, admonishers, advisers, and would-be literary critics. The recent murders of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., lead an unsettled Nathan Zuckerman to wonder if "target" may be more than a figure of speech. Yet, streetcorner recognition and media notoriety are the least disturbing consequences of writing Carnovsky. Against his best interests, the newly renowned novelist retreats from his oldest friends, breaks his marriage to a virtuous woman, and damages, perhaps irreparably, his affectionate connection to his younger brother and his family. Even when finally he lives out the fantasies of his fans and enjoys an exhilarating night with the beautiful and worldly film star Caesara O'Shea (a rather more capable celebrity), he is dismayed the following morning by the caliber of the competition up in the erotic big leagues. In some of Zuckerman *Unbound's* funniest episodes Zuckerman endures the blandishments of another New Jersey boy who has briefly achieved his own moment of stardom. He is the broken and resentful fan Alvin Pepler, in the fifties a national celebrity on the TV quiz show "Smart Money." Thrust back into obscurity when headlined scandals forced the quiz show off the air, Pepler now attaches himself to Zuckerman and won't let go--an "Angel of Manic Delights" to the amused novelist (who momentarily sees him as his "pop self"), and yet also the likely source of a demonic threat. But the surprise that fate finally delivers is more devilish than any cooked up by Alvin Pepler, or even by Zuckerman's imagination. In the coronary-care unit of a Miami Hospital, Nathan's father bestows upon his older son not a blessing but what seems to be a curse. And, in an astonishingly bitter final turn, a confrontation with his brother opens the way for the novelist's deep and painful understanding of the deathblow that Carnovsky has dealt to his own past.

Simon Axler is one of America's leading classical stage actors, but his talent - his magic - has deserted him. All the spontaneity and unthinking impulsiveness that made him great has been replaced by a paralysing self-consciousness. Overwhelmed, Axler's wife promptly leaves him, and Axler checks into a psychiatric hospital. It is only when he begins an affair with Pegeen - formerly a lesbian of 17 years - that Axler's regeneration (and then his final catastrophe) can begin. What kind of choices fatally shape a life? How does the individual withstand the onslaught of circumstance? These are the dark questions that animate *Nemeses*, the quartet of thematically related short novels that are published here together for the first time in this final volume of The Library of America's definitive edition of Philip Roth's collected works. *Everyman* (2006) is the sparse and affecting story of one man's lifelong skirmish with mortality. Set against the

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backdrop of the Korean War, *Indignation* (2008) is the extraordinary narrative of a young man struggling against the conformity of McCarthy-era America and his father's overwhelming fear. In *The Humbling* (2009), aging actor Simon Axler embarks on a risky and aberrant affair in a desperate attempt to recoup his lost artistic gifts. And in *Nemesis* (2010), Roth offers an exacting portrait of the emotions—fear and anger, bewilderment and grief—bred by a polio epidemic in Newark in the summer of 1944. Philip Roth is the only living American novelist to have his work published in a comprehensive, definitive edition by The Library of America. He has received the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award twice, the PEN/Faulkner Award three times, the National Medal of Arts, and the Gold Medal in Fiction, the highest award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. LIBRARY OF AMERICA is an independent nonprofit cultural organization founded in 1979 to preserve our nation's literary heritage by publishing, and keeping permanently in print, America's best and most significant writing. The Library of America series includes more than 300 volumes to date, authoritative editions that average 1,000 pages in length, feature cloth covers, sewn bindings, and ribbon markers, and are printed on premium acid-free paper that will last for centuries.

The four novels in this volume show Wharton at the height of her powers as a social observer and critic, examining American and European lives with a vision rich in detail, satire, and tragedy.

A successful commercial artist with three very different ex-wives, a daughter who adores him, and two sons who despise him, the protagonist finds his confidence, sense of independence, and well-being undermined by an attack of illness in middle age. Reader's Guide available. Reprint. 100,000 first printing.

Like Rip Van Winkle returning to his hometown to find that all has changed, Nathan Zuckerman comes back to New York, the city he left eleven years before. Alone on his New England mountain, Zuckerman has been nothing but a writer: no voices, no media, no terrorist threats, no women, no news, no tasks other than his work and the enduring of old age. Walking the streets like a revenant, he quickly makes three connections that explode his carefully protected solitude. One is with a young couple with whom, in a rash moment, he offers to swap homes. They will flee post-9/11 Manhattan for his country refuge, and he will return to city life. But from the time he meets them, Zuckerman also wants to swap his solitude for the erotic challenge of the young woman, Jamie, whose allure draws him back to all that he thought he had left behind: intimacy, the vibrant play of heart and body. The second connection is with a figure from Zuckerman's youth, Amy Bellette, companion and muse to Zuckerman's first literary hero, E. I. Lonoff. The once irresistible Amy is now an old woman depleted by illness, guarding the memory of that grandly austere American writer who showed Nathan the solitary path to a writing vocation. The third connection is with Lonoff's would-be biographer, a young literary hound who will do and say nearly anything to get to Lonoff's "great secret." Suddenly involved, as he never wanted or intended to

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be involved again, with love, mourning, desire, and animosity, Zuckerman plays out an interior drama of vivid and poignant possibilities. Haunted by Roth's earlier work *The Ghost Writer*, *Exit Ghost* is an amazing leap into yet another phase in this great writer's insatiable commitment to fiction.

He is relentlessly defiant. He is exceedingly libidinous. His appetite for the outrageous is insatiable. He is Mickey Sabbath, the aging, raging powerhouse whose savage effrontery and mocking audacity are at the heart of Philip Roth's astonishing new novel. *Sabbath's Theater* tells Mickey's story in the wake of the death of his mistress, an erotic free spirit whose adulterous daring exceeds even his own. Once a scandalously inventive puppeteer, Mickey is now in his mid-sixties and besieged by ghosts - of his mother, his beloved brother, his vanished first wife, his mistress of thirteen years. Bereft and grieving, he embarks on a turbulent journey back into his past, one that brings him to the brink of madness and extinction. But no matter how ardently he courts death, he is too exuberantly alive to succeed at dying. *Sabbath's Theater* is a comic creation of epic proportions, and Mickey Sabbath is its gargantuan hero. This book presents Philip Roth at the peak of his powers.

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